THE STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARDS

1. INTRODUCTION

In the report of the Task Team for the Promotion and Recognition of Teaching, which was adopted by Senate in June 2015, it is recommended that teaching excellence be recognised at institutional level. The suggested vehicle for such recognition of teaching excellence is “a number of dedicated internal institutional awards that specifically acknowledge teaching achievements, with the HELTASA awards as an important point of reference”. In response to this recommendation the following document outlines a plan for the implementation and continuation of institutional awards for Excellence in Teaching. Some points of departure for the plan are:

- That a call for an annual institutional teaching excellence award be circulated to the SU academic community during the first semester for awarding towards the end of the academic year.
- That the number of awards per faculty will be approximately scaled by the number of fulltime equivalent permanent and temporary teaching staff (including staff of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences on the provincial budget). The number of candidates each faculty may select for this award is as follows:
  - Military Science, Theology, Law and Education: one candidate each
  - AgriSciences, Engineering and Science: two candidates each
  - Medicine & Health Sciences, Arts & Social Sciences and Economic & Management Sciences: four candidates each.
- That the amount of the awards may be adjusted from time to time, subject to the availability of funds, but it will be stipulated as R25 000 per award.
- That the awards will be paid into successful candidates’ salary accounts.
- That the awards are offered in two categories: the Developing Teacher award and the Distinguished Teacher award.
- That a teaching portfolio be the vehicle by which teaching excellence will be judged.
- That the criteria for measuring the teaching portfolios be derived from the current HELTASA National Excellence in Teaching and Learning Awards criteria.
- That the faculty selection process be concluded by the end of Term 3 of the academic year.
- That an institutional announcement regarding the successful candidates will be made during Term 4 and celebrated at a ceremony.

2. AIMS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL AWARD

At Stellenbosch University (SU) good teaching is the expected norm, but excellent teaching is rewarded. (SU Teaching and Learning Policy, 2018:3) These awards are an opportunity to value ‘excellent teaching’, that is, reflective and contextually-aware teaching. (Please refer to the full definition of ‘excellent teaching’ in Section 3, ‘Eligibility’.)

The aims of the institutional excellence in teaching awards are:
- to show support at an institutional level for excellence in teaching and learning in higher education;
to generate a cadre of academics who are able to provide inspiration and leadership in teaching and learning in their disciplines and across the institution;

to generate debate and public awareness about what constitutes teaching excellence for the world as opposed to in the world;

to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning;

to stimulate the growth of professional teachers, and

to generate appreciation of the value of lessons learnt as opposed to only valuing successes.

3. ELIGIBILITY

All staff are eligible for these awards. The awards will be open to individual applications only.

The Developing Teacher award is open to all staff with fewer than ten years, but minimum three years, of engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning. The minimum duration of three years can be dated from a point in time, as identified by the individual, when they chose to proactively start developing their scholarship of teaching and learning. The award as Developing Teacher may be received once only.

The Distinguished Teacher award is open to all staff with ten years or more of engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning. The duration can be calculated from a point in time, as identified by the individual, when they chose to proactively start developing their scholarship of teaching and learning. An individual may receive the award as Distinguished Teacher once in a five-year cycle.

An individual should self-identify the category they wish to apply for.

For the purposes of this document, the following description of the scholarship of teaching practice in the SU Teaching and Learning Policy (2018:5-6) was adopted to describe the scholarship of teaching and learning:

“7.2 Scholarship of teaching practice:

7.2.1 That SU creates enabling physical and virtual environments which support and encourage quality teaching and effective learning at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels;

7.2.2 That during the planning of modules and programmes, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, academics pay attention to students’ diverse academic needs;

7.2.3 That academics make a concerted attempt to meet students at their level and offer appropriate guidance and that students utilise academic development opportunities;

7.2.4 That SU provides integrated systems for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of all students, particularly those most vulnerable;

7.2.5 That, across the institution, there is a shared responsibility to pay attention to holistic student success and the development of the whole student across all levels;

7.2.6 That all role-players at the university familiarise themselves with the reasons for and practical

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1 The policy is currently under revision.
implications of SU’s commitment to a learning-centred approach to teaching and learning; 

7.2.7 That SU management makes the necessary resources available to achieve quality teaching and effective learning at the university; 

7.2.8 That university teachers actively engage in: 

- conducting research on their teaching practice and documenting their professional growth with a view to publishing their findings publicly and contributing to the body of teaching and learning knowledge (i.e. teaching scholars); and 
- contributing to the body of teaching and learning knowledge through publication and provide leadership in the field of teaching practice institutionally, nationally and internationally (leaderly teaching scholars).”

The definition of teaching excellence in the criteria for the HELTASA National Excellence in Teaching and Learning Awards was accepted and adapted as a guideline for this document:

An excellent teacher is aware of her or his context (beyond the immediate environment) and reflects on the ways in which his or her discipline, institution, own history and students’ lived experiences affect teaching and learning. An excellent teacher is a reflective practitioner who has grown more effective over a number of years in relation to increasing knowledge of teaching and learning, experience in teaching and the facilitation of learning, and systematic observations of what happens in the classroom (including how outside factors affect students) with a view to improving student engagement and learning outcomes. An excellent teacher demonstrates a willingness to experiment in their teaching with new means at their disposal and integrates innovative practices into their teaching. An excellent teacher has a clearly articulated teaching philosophy, informed by educational theory, and appropriate for a university teaching context. Teaching experience can include both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. ‘Teaching’ can be interpreted broadly to include curriculum design and delivery, the latter in class, online or through materials development.

4. APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

- The office of the Vice-Rector (Learning and Teaching) sends out the call for applications during Semester 1 of the academic year, outlining the aims of the awards and the processes whereby they are awarded, to the Deans and Deputy Deans Teaching and Learning (or equivalent) of each faculty.
- The Deans and Deputy Deans Teaching and Learning (or equivalent) of each faculty are asked to circulate the call to all staff.
- Each faculty identifies possible nominees and organises its own internal processes to select candidates. Candidates may also nominate themselves.
- Faculties must indicate on the cover sheet which will be provided whether their candidates are applying for a Developing Teacher or Distinguished Teacher award. (Please refer to Section 3, 5 and 6 for guidelines.)

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2 A learning-centred approach to teaching is described as teaching “where learning is understood as becoming a successful participant in academic practice and disciplined enquiry.” In this approach “teaching activities facilitate knowledge-building and engage students actively in their learning.” (SU Teaching and Learning Policy, 2018:2)
• Support for the selection of nominees or the portfolio development process will be available from the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) upon request.

• The candidate/s selected by each faculty prepare(s) a portfolio with due attention to the criteria in the call. The candidate/s might choose to receive critical advice and feedback from the CTL or other peers.

• Faculty selection panels need to provide their candidate/s with feedback on their portfolios and allow them enough time to revise their portfolios before the final submission date of 31 August.

• Faculty selection panels should consult Section 7, ‘Nomination Guidelines for Faculties’. The guidelines provide descriptors of Commendable, Evolving and Promising portfolios which will assist faculties in selecting their candidate/s. Promising portfolios should not be submitted for an award.

• A selection committee comprising colleagues from the Division for Learning and Teaching Enhancement as well as a selection of Deputy Deans Teaching and Learning will be appointed and chaired by the Vice-Rector (Learning and Teaching) or her/his designate. This committee will evaluate the teaching portfolios of the nominees according to the rubric provided in Section 6, ‘Criteria for Evaluating a Teaching Portfolio’. The committee will have the authority to refer portfolios back to faculties for further development. All nominees will receive feedback on their portfolios.

• Successful Distinguished Teacher nominees may be encouraged to apply for the HELTASA National Excellence in Teaching and Learning awards the following year. Nominees showing potential to become HELTASA nominees will be further supported to continue developing their portfolio.

• The successful nominees will be informed of their selection and the awards will be announced at a ceremony in Term 4.

5. TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Applicants will be required to submit a teaching portfolio (in pdf or online), consisting of a reflective narrative and supporting evidence, spanning the applicant’s years of teaching and scholarship of teaching and learning but also including current teaching and scholarship of teaching and learning.

A portfolio resource will be available on the website of the CTL. The CTL Faculty Advisors could present workshops on or provide individual assistance with compiling a teaching portfolio. Academics with experience of compiling a teaching portfolio may be involved in portfolio development workshops.

5.1 Format

• All applications must be accompanied by the cover sheet, to be completed by the applicant and signed by the Dean of the faculty (a one-page template will be provided).

• A photograph of the applicant and brief curriculum vitae (two pages) should be included. The curriculum vitae should emphasise the scholarship of teaching and learning.

• The portfolio comprises two parts:
  o A reflective and scholarly narrative about the teaching and learning practice of the applicant (what they do, how and why) (10 to 20 pages long). (Please refer to 5.2, ‘Guidelines for Reflective Narrative.’) The narrative should address the four elements detailed under 5.2, but the content can be structured in any way the applicant prefers and can be in any format. If the portfolio is online, the total reflective narrative part should be no longer than 20 pages if printed out. All claims made in the narrative need to be substantiated with evidence.
The evidence can be in the form of brief examples included in the reflective narrative or by reference/hyperlink to appendices. (Please refer to 5.3, ‘Guidelines for Evidence’.) If appendices are included, there should be no more than 30 pages of appendices and/or two 3-minute audio or video recordings. If the portfolio is online, the total length of the appendices should be no more than 30 pages if printed out.

- If the reflective narrative and/or appendices exceed the maximum length, the selection committee will not consider any content after the final page limit of each subsection.
- A font size of 11 and line spacing of 1.5 should be used.
- No incomplete applications will be eligible for the award. However, the selection committee will provide feedback to nominees who submitted incomplete applications.
- As the selection committee represents a variety of disciplines, applicants need to articulate what makes their teaching and learning practice excellent in a way that would be accessible to all.

5.2 Guidelines for Reflective Narrative

A reflective narrative should describe how an applicant teaches (critical reflection on practice) and why they do it in that way (teaching philosophy and role). If an applicant is not familiar with the concept or practice of critical reflection and/or has not drafted a teaching philosophy before, assistance will be available from the CTL.

The reflective narrative should demonstrate the professional growth of the applicant, especially with regard to their scholarship of teaching and learning. It should therefore not only include successes, but also challenges, mistakes and lessons learnt. It should also mention how the applicant intends to further their professional growth, both in their teaching role and their teaching practice.

The reflective narrative should show some deliberation on the following four elements:

- **Reflection on Context**

  Where does your teaching take place? What are the macro, meso and micro issues that you take into account in your teaching? How do your curriculum decisions and teaching approaches reflect the geographical, historical and social context of your classroom? In what ways does your context enable or constrain how you teach and assess? How do you integrate pertinent local and topical issues into your curriculum? What are the institutional, student body, professional, national and international contextual issues that affect your teaching and learning context? How does your curriculum address concerns affecting the planet? What changes have you made to the curriculum to ensure it addresses your context? How does your teaching promote a consciousness/awareness of the global context?

- **Reflection on Students**

  Who are your students? How does your teaching ensure that all students feel included and are engaged actively in their own learning? How do you get to know what your students bring with them to your classroom? How do you teach in ways that encourage students to participate in knowledge production processes? How do you address problems of student underpreparedness in your curriculum? How does your curriculum structure provide sufficient support for students? How do you develop your students’
capacities and prepare them to be the critical citizens of the future? How does your curriculum and teaching strategies enrich students with exceptional abilities? How do you adapt your teaching in response to your student feedback? How do you interpret your student success data in the context of your curriculum and teaching strategies?

- **Reflection on Knowledge**

What is your discipline / profession and what are its key features? What aspects of the course or programme do your students battle with and how have you addressed this through your teaching approach? How do your teaching and assessment approaches ensure that the practices of the discipline and/or profession become accessible to all? In what ways does your teaching allow students to have access to the discipline? What do you do to make sure your students can contribute to knowledge production and not just to knowledge consumption? How do you ensure that you maintain disciplinary depth? How does being an active scholar affect your teaching? How do your contributions to your discipline improve your teaching?

- **Reflection on Growth**

What innovative approaches enhance your teaching? How has technology been used to improve the student experience and enable better understanding of core concepts? How do you use alternative teaching and learning techniques to improve student engagement? How do you critically evaluate your own teaching? How do you actively solicit peer evaluation and critique to enhance your teaching? How do you think you have developed as an excellent teacher over time? How have you contributed to curriculum development? How does your approach to assessment enhance learning? How has your scholarship contributed to institutional development (and beyond)?

The sets of questions above should help applicants to brainstorm the kinds of issues they might like to reflect on. While applicants need to show engagement with all four elements, the questions are simply provided to stimulate ideas – applicants are not expected to answer every question. Furthermore, applicants are not expected to rate highly with regard to all four elements, but need to address as many elements as possible. This should be done clearly and concisely.

### 5.3 Guidelines for Evidence

Claims made in the reflective narrative should be substantiated by evidence, as measured against the portfolio evaluation rubric (please refer to Section 6, ‘Criteria for Evaluating a Teaching Portfolio’). This could be in the form of brief examples in the reflective narrative itself or concise appendices in which longer examples and other substantiating information are included. Appendices should only include evidence pertinent to particular statements in the reflective narrative. Evidence should therefore be judiciously selected and all appendices must be directly referred to/hyperlinked in the narrative.

The CTL could provide assistance with which evidence to select and how to compile the appendices.
5.3.1 Developing Teacher

For the Developing Teacher category, evidence of excellent teaching\(^3\) should include but is not restricted to the following:

Information about the applicant and the applicant’s teaching context (position in the institution; part-/full-time; discipline and module(s) taught; size of classes; teaching context, e.g. main/other campus, areas of key challenge, outside/social factors that affect teaching):

- Information about the ways in which the needs of the diverse student body have been met (choose the five most significant ways and explain the reasons for the selection);
- Information about the adjustment of curricula and teaching materials to a South African context, where appropriate;
- Information about setting high but realistic expectations for students and fostering critical thinking;
- Information about encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning;
- Peer feedback from colleagues;
- Student feedback (formal or informal);
- Student success data;
- Artefacts such as module frameworks, brief extracts from study guides, multimedia, online materials, innovative student assessment, photographs;
- Information about successes achieved as well as lessons learnt.

The evidence should demonstrate in what ways the applicant’s teaching is excellent rather than good and how the applicant has developed from good to excellent.

5.3.2 Distinguished Teacher

For the Distinguished Teacher award, evidence of the scholarship of teaching and learning as detailed below is required in addition to the same evidence required for the Developing Teacher category:

Evidence of the applicant’s involvement with the scholarship of teaching and learning that has a broader impact within the university and beyond that includes but is not restricted to the following:

- Papers presented on the subject of Teaching and Learning at conferences (applicants select the abstracts of their top five papers and explain the reasons for the selection);
- Articles or other publications on teaching and learning (applicants select the abstracts of their top five articles or other publications and explain the reasons for the selection);
- Membership of professional associations (teaching and learning or disciplinary associations) to which the applicant is a significant contributor based on evidence of conference attendance, papers presented, review activities, membership of special interest groups or of the executive;
- Internal/external moderation of exams and dissertations/theses;
- Names of university committees and national/international committees and evidence of the applicant’s contribution;

\(^3\text{Excellent and good teaching are defined in Section 2 and 3.}\)
- List of formal and non-formal continuing professional learning in Teaching and Learning;
- List of students or staff mentored or supervised in relation to Teaching and Learning;
- List of awards received in relation to Teaching and Learning;
- List of Teaching and Learning journals the applicant has reviewed articles for;
- Application/extension of Teaching and Learning to the communities in the institutional environment.

6. **CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING A TEACHING PORTFOLIO**

The following rubric will be used by the selection committee to evaluate the portfolios:

<table>
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<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Contextual Awareness</th>
<th>Critical Reflection</th>
<th>Student Engagement</th>
<th>Innovative Practice</th>
<th>Scholarliness</th>
<th>Presentation: length, font size, line spacing, organisation</th>
<th>Notes (include Commendable, Evolving or Promising Portfolio)</th>
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<tr>
<td>‘Teaching’: broadly interpreted to include the design of curricula, teaching and learning activities and assessment opportunities.</td>
<td>Demonstrates awareness of the context – social as well as teaching and learning (department, faculty, institution, and beyond) – within which teaching happens and how it influences learning.</td>
<td>Reflects deliberately on teaching practice and professional growth with a view to continuous development in teaching role as well as teaching practice. Elements highlighted: context, students, knowledge and growth.</td>
<td>Draws students into teaching and engages them actively in their own learning.</td>
<td>Uses innovative approaches to enhance student engagement with knowledge.</td>
<td>Draws on educational literature to reflect on teaching practice and professional growth. Researches teaching practice and documents professional growth. Contributes to the body of teaching and learning knowledge through publication and provides leadership in the field of teaching practice institutionally, nationally and internationally (particularly important for Distinguished Teacher).</td>
<td>Length: a) Reflective narrative: 10-20 pp.; b) Appendices: 30 pp. Font size: 11 Line spacing: 1.5 Organisation: only brief evidence included in reflective narrative; detailed evidence in appendices.</td>
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| Coherence | 1. **Commendable Portfolio**  
The portfolio makes a convincing case for excellence in that the academic has reflected on multiple aspects of their context, including their students, institution and discipline/programme. The portfolio clearly describes the teaching and learning practice and provides an explanation of why the applicant adopts the approach that s/he does (teaching philosophy). The teaching practice is underpinned by educational theory. Teaching methods used are contextually nuanced and are aligned to the stated philosophy. Robust and diverse evidence has been provided for the claims made in the portfolio. The academic is constantly looking for ways of improving and can reflect on growth over time and in response to changing contexts or new understandings. The academic has had a positive institutional, national or international impact on teaching and learning in higher education. The portfolio demonstrates excellence in teaching that can serve as an inspiration or can deepen understandings of this crucial aspect of higher education. | 7. **NOMINATION GUIDELINES FOR FACULTIES**  
The following guidelines are useful for evaluating teaching excellence and can assist faculties with the selection and nomination process (please also refer to Section 6, ‘Criteria for Evaluating a Teaching Portfolio’):  

- **Commendable Portfolio**  
The portfolio makes a convincing case for excellence in that the academic has reflected on multiple aspects of his/her context, including his/her students, institution and discipline/programme. The portfolio clearly describes the teaching and learning practice and provides an explanation of why the applicant adopts the approach that s/he does (teaching philosophy). The teaching practice is underpinned by educational theory. Teaching methods used are contextually nuanced and are aligned to the stated philosophy. Robust and diverse evidence has been provided for the claims made in the portfolio. The academic is constantly looking for ways of improving and can reflect on growth over time and in response to changing contexts or new understandings. The academic has had a positive institutional, national or international impact on teaching and learning in higher education. The portfolio demonstrates excellence in teaching that can serve as inspiration or can deepen understandings of this crucial aspect of higher education. |

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• **Evolving Portfolio**

The portfolio makes a case for excellence in that the academic has reflected on aspects of his/her context, including his/her students, institution and discipline/programme. The portfolio describes the teaching and learning practice and provides an explanation of why the applicant adopts the approach that s/he does (teaching philosophy). The teaching practice is underpinned by some educational theory. Teaching methods used are adapted to context and aligned to the stated philosophy. Evidence has been provided for the claims made in the portfolio. The academic looks for ways of improving and can reflect on growth over time. The academic has had a positive impact on teaching and learning in higher education beyond their classroom. The portfolio demonstrates excellence in teaching that can promote better practice and encourage others.

• **Promising Portfolio**

The portfolio begins to construct a case for excellence in that the academic has reflected on aspects of context. The portfolio describes the teaching and learning practice and provides an explanation of why the applicant adopts the approach that s/he does (teaching philosophy). There are one or two references to educational theory. Teaching methods used are adapted to context but perhaps not very well aligned to philosophy (or vice versa). While evidence has been provided for some of the claims made in the portfolio, some claims are not substantiated. The academic looks for ways of improving. The academic has had a positive impact on teaching and learning. The portfolio demonstrates the development of excellence in teaching.

*Promising portfolios are not yet ready for nomination and should not be submitted. The SU selection committee will have the authority to put any submitted portfolio in the ‘promising’ category.*